

## **“Brace” Yourself! Know Your TRICARE Orthodontic Benefits**

Orthodontic treatment (“braces”) helps achieve balance and harmony between the teeth and face for an attractive and healthy smile. This can enhance self-esteem and ultimately improve quality of life. Properly aligned teeth are easier to brush and may decrease the tendency to develop tooth decay or gum disease. A correct bite helps distribute the chewing forces throughout the mouth to minimize excessive stress on bones, gum tissues and jaw joints.

The TRICARE Family Member Dental Program offers coverage for orthodontic treatment up to a lifetime maximum of \$1,500 per family member. Family members who are eligible are spouses up to age 23 and children up to age 21 (age 23 if full-time student). There are some steps that you need to follow prior to the beneficiary initiating orthodontic treatment. This process is done to protect the beneficiary and ensure that the proposed treatment plan is appropriate. The steps necessary to obtain pre-authorization for orthodontic treatment will be reviewed and other facts will be presented that should make you a better dental consumer.

### **The Pre-Authorization “Orthodontic Package”**

In order to evaluate a request for orthodontic care, a complete orthodontic package needs to be submitted in English and mailed to the TRICARE Support Office (TSO). The package must include the following information:

- **The United Concordia Non-Availability and Referral Form**

The sponsor must complete blocks 1-9, 11, 15 and sign the form. All the information requested is important for pre-authorization of treatment. The importance of the sponsor’s rotation date and the length of treatment under the proposed treatment plan will be discussed below. A TLAC Authorized Orthodontist from the approved lead agent list must provide the treatment.

- **Proposed Orthodontic Treatment Plan and Estimated Length of Treatment**

Your orthodontist should provide this information to you. It is a detailed plan that must include a problem list and objectives, sequence and length of treatment. The orthodontist must indicate the type of appliances to be used to achieve the proposed plan.

- **Orthodontic Diagnostic Records**

The orthodontist will obtain orthodontic study records prior to initiating treatment. You must submit the original or a copy of the complete diagnostic records. The records must include: 1) properly trimmed or articulated stone models of the patient’s teeth, 2) photos of the patient’s face (front and profile views), 3) photos of the patient’s teeth (front, left and right sides, and each arch) and 4) panoramic and cephalometric (facial profile) X-rays. All records need to be submitted for review in order to establish the best course of

treatment and to evaluate the proposed treatment plan by your orthodontist. These records will be returned to you once they are reviewed. Please use adequate packaging materials since the stone models are very fragile.

## **Timing of Orthodontic Treatment**

One of the most difficult decisions you are faced with is deciding when to start orthodontic treatment, since TRICARE provides \$1,500 lifetime limited coverage per beneficiary. The American Association of Orthodontists recommends that all children have an orthodontic screening no later than age 7. This does not mean that every child age 7 requires braces. The importance of this screening exam is to determine any potential future problems that may be able to be addressed early during the child's growth and development. In general, active orthodontic treatment ranges from 1 to 3 years depending on the severity of the problem and the cooperation of the patient. In certain situations, which require some type of growth modification, treatment may be done in multiple phases and may require a longer period of time to be completed.

Treatment timing is important to the orthodontist, and it is also very important to you in order to be a wise dental consumer. The reason we request the sponsor's rotation date and the estimated length of treatment is to try to protect your money. You must understand that if the treatment is not completed at one location, the orthodontist that continues the care may charge a transfer fee or full fee and you may have already spent your lifetime coverage. In some situations, it is best to wait until you are able to complete the treatment at the same location. Other situations require starting treatment early in order to intercept some potential problems.

## **Continuation of CONUS Orthodontic Treatment**

If orthodontic treatment was initiated in CONUS and the OCONUS orthodontist plans to continue the original treatment plan, then you must submit a completed Non-Availability and Referral Form, a copy of the original treatment plan, and a signed statement from the OCONUS orthodontist that the original treatment plan will be continued. If the OCONUS orthodontist wants to change the treatment plan, pre-authorization is required by following the instructions as for a new case.

## **Point of Contact and Address**

Submit your pre-authorization requests to:  
Commander, DDEAMC  
DoD TRICARE Health Services Region 15  
LASE-TLAC, B38801  
Fort Gordon, GA 30905-5650  
Telephone: 1-888-777-8343, Option #3, 706-787-2424, DSN 773-2424

For more information about orthodontic treatment, visit the American Association of Orthodontists website at [www.braces.org](http://www.braces.org)